

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT	
Project Name: Triangle Fiber Optic Project	Proposed Implementation Date: Fall 2020
Proponent: Triangle Communications, PO Box 1140, Havre, MT 59501	
<p>Type and Purpose of Action: The applicant proposes to install two (2) underground telecommunications cables in the same trench within a right-of-way 20' wide (10' on either side of a centerline) across School Trust land in Phillips County. These cables will be "knifed in" (entrenched using machinery that requires very little digging, usually a line about 12" wide at most) along/adjacent to the right-of-way granted to Montana Dept. of Transportation for a State highway. The cable will allow for improved telecommunication capabilities in this rural area and the surrounding communities.</p>	
Location: Lot 1, Lot 2, Lot3, Lot, 4, Sec 2, Twp 31N, Rge 27E, NW 3/4 NW 1/4, Sec 16, Twp 33N, Rge 29E, SE 1/4 SW 1/4, W 1/2 SE 1/4, SW 1/4 NE 1/4, E 1/2 NE 1/4, Sec 16, Twp 33N, Rge 28E, E 1/2 E 1/2, Sec 36, Twp 33N, Rge 26E, N 1/2 N 1/2, Sec 21 Twp 32N, Rge 29E	County: Phillips

I. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT	
1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED: Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.	Arica Lowe, ROW agent for Triangle Communications, sent a complete application to install the cable to Lisa Axline, ROW supervisor in Helena. The application was provided to the Montana Sage-Grouse Oversight Team (MSGOT) for approval and recommendations for stipulations in order to comply with executive orders 12-2015 and 21-2015. The application was then forwarded on to the Glasgow Unit Office.
2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:	No other governmental agencies have jurisdiction over this project as it pertains to School Trust lands. Montana DNRC, Real Estate Management Bureau has jurisdiction over the project.
3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:	Action Alternative: Grant permission to Triangle Communications to install the underground telecommunications cable on

	<p>School Trust land.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Deny permission to Triangle Communications to install the underground telecommunications cable on School Trust land.</p>
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II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	
RESOURCE	POTENTIAL IMPACTS
<p>4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE: Are fragile, compatible or unstable soils present? Are there unusual geologic features? Are there special reclamation considerations?</p>	<p>The area of impact contains several clay loams types a Kevin-Elloam, Phillips loam, Sunburst clay loam, Phillips-Elloam complex, and Scobey clay loam. These soils which are comprised of well-drained loams, clay loam and gravelly loams on slight to steep slopes. These soils are not fragile or unstable. There is increased susceptibility to erosion, rutting and general disturbance to the soil during wet/rainy periods.</p> <p>Action Alternative: There will be some soil disturbance due to the digging (knifing) required to install the cable underground. The area of impact has already seen significant disturbance in the past, with the installation of the highway directly adjacent.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no changes to soils on the State land.</p>
<p>5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION: Are important surface or groundwater resources present? Is there potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality?</p>	<p>There are no important water resources present within the area of impact. There is no potential for impact on drinking water in the area.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The proposed cable installation would not negatively impact the quality, quantity and distribution of water.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this</p>

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	
	alternative, there will be no impacts to water quality, quantity and distribution.
6. AIR QUALITY: Will pollutants or particulate be produced? Is the project influenced by air quality regulations or zones (Class I airshed)?	<p>This project is not influenced by any air quality regulations or zones. A short-term increase in vehicle traffic would result in a slight increase in dust.</p> <p>Action Alternative: This type of project on the State land will have minimal impact to the air quality.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no impacts to air quality.</p>
7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY: Will vegetative communities be permanently altered? Are any rare plants or cover types present?	<p>The current vegetative community consists primarily of non-native grasses. The project would have very little impact on the vegetative community due to the knifing process used to install the cable. No rare plants or cover types are present.</p> <p>Action Alternative: Vegetation would see some "trampling" from vehicle use. The trenching during installation of the cable would leave a small area where vegetation is disturbed/destroyed.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no impacts to the plant communities on the State land.</p>
8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS: Is there substantial use of the area by important wildlife, birds or fish?	<p>The School Trust land provides habitat for upland birds, elk and deer. There is very little potential for recreation (hunting) on this School Trust land.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The area of impact is small and would only degrade habitat for a short period. Any impacts during digging would be small</p>

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	
	<p>and would be mitigated quickly with regrowth of vegetation.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no impacts to the possible use of the State land as wildlife habitat.</p>
<p>9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES: Are any federally listed threatened or endangered species or identified habitat present? Any wetlands? Sensitive Species or Species of special concern?</p>	<p>The area of impact is within short-grass prairie habitat that is important nesting habitat for migratory songbirds and upland birds. No wetlands are within the area of impact. Species of concern seasonally/potentially present in the area include: Black-tailed prairie dog, Black-footed ferret, Swift Fox, Hoary Bat, Greater Sage-Grouse, Sprague's Pipit, Great Blue Heron, Chestnut-Collared Longspur, McCown's Longspur, Long-Billed Curlew, Golden Eagle, Ferruginous Hawk, Baird's Sparrow, Loggerhead Shrike Greater Short-Horned Lizard, Northern Redbelly Dace, and Norther Pearl Dace. Due to much of the project's location being within Core or General Greater Sage-Grouse habitat as classified by the MSGOT, the project was reviewed by MSGOT and some stipulations were added to the proposed project to comply with executive orders 12-2015 and 21-2015.</p> <p>Action Alternative: Installation of the cable on School Trust land would degrade habitat temporarily. These impacts will be mitigated quickly with regrowth of vegetation during the next growing season.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no impacts to the environmental resources.</p>
<p>10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES: Are any historical, archaeological or paleontological resources present?</p>	<p>A Class I (literature review) level review was conducted by the DNRC staff archaeologist for the area of potential effect (APE). This entailed</p>

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

inspection of project maps, DNRC's sites/site leads database, land use records, General Land Office Survey Plats, and control cards. The Class I search results revealed that no cultural or paleontological resources have been identified in the APE, so no additional archaeological investigative work will be conducted in response to this proposed development. However, if previously unknown cultural or paleontological materials are identified during project related activities, all work will cease until a professional assessment of such resources can be made.

Action Alternative: The proposed cable would have no impact on historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

No Action Alternative: There will be no impact to historical or archaeological sites under this alternative.

11. AESTHETICS: Is the project on a prominent topographic feature? Will it be visible from populated or scenic areas? Will there be excessive noise or light?

The proposed cable installation will have minimal impact on the aesthetics of the area. The area of impact is directly adjacent to a State highway, so the project will be visible to the public. Noise levels may increase slightly due to increased vehicle traffic, but there will be no excessive levels of noise or light.

Action Alternative: Minimal short-term impacts to the aesthetics of the School Trust land are expected.

No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no impacts to aesthetics associated with the School Trust land.

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	
<p>12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY: Will the project use resources that are limited in the area? Are there other activities nearby that will affect the project?</p>	<p>Environmental resources in the area are not specifically limited and are not affected by the proposed project. No nearby activities will affect the project.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The proposed cable installation will place no additional demands on any environmental resources in the area.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no demands placed on environmental resources of land, water, air or energy.</p>
<p>13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA: Are there other studies, plans or projects on this tract?</p>	<p>There are currently no other studies, plans or projects on this tract.</p> <p>Action Alternative: This project would not impact any other plans or studies that Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation has on the School Trust land.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no impacts to the plans or studies that Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation has on the School Trust land.</p>

III. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION	
RESOURCE	POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES
<p>14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY: Will this project add to health and safety risks in the area?</p>	<p>The operation and movement of heavy equipment and vehicles has inherent risks.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The installation of the cable would slightly increase the risk of human health and safety during the project due to increased vehicle traffic and machinery use.</p>

	<p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no impacts to human health or safety.</p>
<p>15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION: Will the project add to or alter these activities?</p>	<p>Action Alternative: The disturbance to vegetation on the tract would have no economic impact on the agricultural activities on this tract.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no impacts to agricultural activities on the School Trust land.</p>
<p>16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT: Will the project create, move or eliminate jobs? If so, estimated number.</p>	<p>Action Alternative: The project would not create nor impact any jobs in the area.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There will be no impacts to quantity and distribution of employment under this alternative.</p>
<p>17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES: Will the project create or eliminate tax revenue?</p>	<p>Action Alternative: The project would have no impacts on the local and state tax base and tax revenues.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There will be no impacts to the local and state tax base under this alternative.</p>
<p>18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES: Will substantial traffic be added to existing roads? Will other services (fire protection, police, schools, etc) be needed?</p>	<p>Action Alternative: The project would increase traffic along the nearby highway during installation. There would be no additional demand for governmental services.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no additional demand for government services.</p>
<p>19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS: Are there State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, etc. zoning or management plans in effect?</p>	<p>There are no special management plans in effect on the School Trust land. It is managed for typical agricultural activities and livestock grazing.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The project has cleared State (DNRC) management plans.</p>

	<p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no impacts to locally adopted environmental plans and goals.</p>
<p>20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES: Are wilderness or recreational areas nearby or accessed through this tract? Is there recreational potential within the tract?</p>	<p>This tract has a small potential for upland bird, antelope and deer hunting.</p> <p>Action Alternative: No changes to public land access or recreational potential would occur.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There will be no impacts to the recreational values associated with the State land under this alternative.</p>
<p>21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING: Will the project add to the population and require additional housing?</p>	<p>Action Alternative: The project would not impact the density and distribution of population and housing.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There will be no impacts to the density and distribution of population and housing.</p>
<p>22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES: Is some disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities possible?</p>	<p>Action Alternative: The project would not disrupt the traditional lifestyles of the local community.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There will be no impacts to the social structures under this alternative.</p>
<p>23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY: Will the action cause a shift in some unique quality of the area?</p>	<p>Action Alternative: The project would not impact the cultural uniqueness and diversity of this rural area.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There will be no impacts to the cultural uniqueness and diversity under this alternative.</p>
<p>24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:</p>	<p>This telecommunications cable is intended to provide greater telecommunication capabilities in the surrounding area/communities. This is a very rural area with limited</p>

	<p>capabilities.</p> <p>Action Alternative: Allowing installation of the cable across School Trust land would have little economic impact to the School Trust but would provide surrounding communities with increased telecommunications capabilities.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There will be no impacts to the social and economic circumstances under this alternative.</p>
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EA Checklist Prepared By: s/Luke Gunderson Date: 10/26/2020
Luke Gunderson Land Use Specialist

IV. FINDING	
25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:	Action Alternative
26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:	No significant impacts expected.
27. Need for Further Environmental Analysis: <input type="checkbox"/> EIS <input type="checkbox"/> More Detailed EA <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No Further Analysis	

EA Checklist Approved By: Matthew Poole Glasgow Unit Manager
Name Title

s/Matthew Poole\s Date: November 3, 2020
Signature